

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6290

S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 4487

E. O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: ASEC, PINT, PINS, AR

SUBJECT: FURTHER ON MURDER OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 4443

1. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED INFORMATION SUBSEQUENT TO REFTEL WHICH CONFIRMS THAT PRIESTS WERE MURDERED BY GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES. HOWEVER, IT IS NOW CLEAR THEY WERE KILLED BY MEMBERS OF FEDERAL POLICE, NOT BY ARMY. POLICE BELIEVED THE TWO SEMINARIANS WERE INVOLVED WITH "THIRD WORLD" MOVEMENT OF PRIESTS, WHICH HAS HEADQUARTERS NOT FAR FROM THE CHURCH; HENCE, THEY WERE CONSIDERED FAIR GAME IN WAVE OF VIGILANTE-TYPE EXECUTIONS POLICE HAVE CARRIED OUT IN RETALIATION FOR BOMBING OF POLICE OFFICE ON JULY 2 (SEE SEPTTEL). ACCORDING TO LEGATT SOURCES, POLICE NEVER AT ANY TIME BELIEVED MONTONERO LEADER FIRMENICH HAD BEEN SHELTERED BY PRIESTS. THAT IS SIMPLY A FABRICATED STORY THEY ARE PUTTING OUT IN ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY A MURDER WHICH EVEN BY ARGENTINE STANDARDS WAS EXCEEDINGLY BRUTAL AND MINDLESS. POLICE SOURCES HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT MURDERS WERE COMMITTED BY NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS WITHOUT ANY HIGHER AUTHORIZATION.

2. AMBASSADOR HILL AND RSO SAW PAPAL NUNCIO JULY 8. LATTER SAYS ALLEGATION THAT PRIESTS HAD SHELTERED FIRMENICH IS AN OUT-AND-OUT LIE. HE ALSO SAID REPORT
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THAT NUNS HAD BEEN KILLED WAS "SOMEONE'S IMAGINATION."

NUNCIO INDICATED CHURCH HAD BEEN CONCERNED THAT ONE OF THE SEMINARIANS MIGHT HAVE SOME "THIRD WORLD" CONNECTIONS. NUNCIO EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN IF SUCH WERE THE CASE, THAT HARDLY JUSTIFIED MURDER OF SEMINARIANS, LET ALONE OF PRIESTS WHO WERE IN NO WAY INVOLVED.

3. NUNCIO INDICATED CARDINAL ARAMBURU HAD STATED FLATLY TO MINISTER OF INTERIOR THAT CHURCH KNEW BEYOND ANY DOUBT THAT IT WAS GOA SECURITY FORCES WHO HAD MURDERED THE PRIESTS. ARAMBURU SAID FURTHER TO HAVE TOLD MINISTER THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER THAT LATTER MAKE NO COMMENT SINCE A DENIAL WOULD SIMPLY BE A LIE. MINISTER OBLIGED AND REMAINED SILENT.

4. NUNCIO INFORMED AMBASSADOR HILL THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY ONE RANKING OFFICIAL OF GOA THAT GOVT INTENDED TO "CLEAN UP THE CATHOLIC CHURCH". NUNCIO CLAIMED "SOME GENERALS" WANTED A CATHOLIC HIERARCHY "SUCH AS WE HAD IN ARGENTINA TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO." NUNCIO SPECULATED THAT MURDER OF THE PRIESTS MIGHT BE FIRST STEP IN "CLEANING UP" THE CHURCH.

5. COMMENT. NUNCIO SAID HE FEARED MURDER OF PRIESTS MAY PRESAGE A WAVE OF RIGHT-WING TERROR WORSE THAN ANYTHING WE HAVE SEEN BEFORE. GIVEN CORBETTA'S FAILURE TO BRING POLICE TERROR UNDER CONTROL AND INTERIOR MINISTER'S REMARKS LAST NIGHT LAUDING POLICE AND SUGGESTING THEY WILL TAKE ANY MEASURE THEY DEEM NECESSARY IN COMBATTING SUBVERSION, EMBASSY IS INCLINED TO AGREE.
HILL

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NNN

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